

THE ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
FOR THE
URBAN DISTRICT OF DRIFFIELD
FOR THE YEAR 1896.

Gentlemen,

I have the honour to submit my annual report for the year ending December 31st, 1896, including the statistical returns of the deaths in the district, and the various measures adopted for the prevention of disease.

During the past twelve months there were registered, according to the monthly returns sent in by the Registrar, 161 births and 96 deaths.

Of the births, 68 were males and 93 females.

The birth-rate was equal to 28·2 per 1000, out of a population of 5701 according to the census of 1891.

Of the deaths 40 were males, and 56 females, and out of this number 14 died in the Union Workhouse, and one death took place in the Cottage Hospital.

The annual death-rate per 1000, from all causes, for the year under notice was 16·6, and is consequently lower than that of 1895, when it stood at 18·9.

The lower death-rate which marks the past year, is therefore the first feature which arrests our attention and speaks very favourably, for the manner in which the Public Health has been sustained not only when a comparison is drawn from our former experience, but likewise when we adopt as our standard the average death-rate, which prevails amidst the larger centres of our population throughout the country.

Upon an analysis of the monthly returns from the Registrar, with only one exception, namely Diphtheria, do we find the so-called Zymotic diseases take a prominent part.

We have had no death from Enteric Fever, Scarlatina, Small-pox nor Measles. Diarrhoea has been fatal in 3 cases, and Croup has claimed one victim, whilst the other forms are only noticeable by their absence, when compared with much of our experience in former years.

With regard to Diphtheria which stands out somewhat conspicuously in our annual record as having proved fatal in 8 cases, it may be here stated that it is by no means easy to fix upon the precise cause of this mysterious malady, inasmuch as the complaint occurs under such a variety of conditions, and is apt to manifest itself amongst all classes, without any apparent distinction, and amidst all kinds of surroundings.

We also find that not unfrequently a marked predisposition to this malady exists in certain families as well as to other allied diseases, such as Croup, and Throat complaints generally, the source of which is often obscure and difficult to trace.

In many cases however local conditions apart from infection do undoubtedly favour its occurrence, such as close and confined dwellings where the free circulation of fresh air is impeded, or ill-ventilated bed-rooms, damp walls and subsoil, or the bad smells arising within or around the homes of those families where such a tendency happens to prevail.

The prevalence of this complaint as shown by its fatal results, attracted the notice of the Medical Department of the Local Government Board, who requested me to furnish a special report which contained a detailed statement of each individual case, and the circumstances under which it occurred.

A considerable interval has now passed over without any fresh case having been brought under our notice. We may therefore hope we are again entering upon a new era similar to that experienced in bygone years, when we have enjoyed an entire freedom from its fatal ravages.

Outbreaks of Epidemic disease apparently obey some periodical law which determines their appearance at certain intervals, and after their destructive force has become expended they disappear, and are only brought back to our memories by the sorrowful gaps that are left behind.

A new mode of treatment of this much dreaded disease to which special allusion has just been made, has lately been introduced to the profession, and which we are informed has already led to valuable results—namely by the injection of “Diphtheria Antitoxine,” and which is believed to be capable of neutralising bacterial poison.

Since the introduction of this new remedy, we are told there has been a surprising decrease of mortality resulting from its use, especially in Public Hospitals

where it has been largely practised, and the treatment has already attained a considerable amount of popularity in those countries where the alleged antidote has been more extensively tried than in our own.

If this method should realize the expectations of its advocates, whether we regard it in the light of a protection or as a cure, it would justly then take rank, next to vaccination, as being one of the greatest blessings that Science has given to mankind.

Passing over the other forms of infectious disease as having given us so little trouble, I may here remark that we now meet with a more general aspect of comfort amongst the poorer classes, and a greater tendency to abandon badly situated and ill-constructed cottages, and to seek out others that afford greater comfort or are in closer accordance with modern ideas.

This is a subject that has been so often referred to in former reports as to render it difficult to say anything new, or to escape the charge of having being guilty of too frequent repetition.

The most fatal period of life as shown by the returns of the past year, has been from the age of 65 and upwards, when 32 persons have died. The next period is between the ages of 25 and 65, when the deaths amount to 24, and 19 Children have died under the age of 1 year.

MONTHLY TABLE OF DEATHS.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
January	5	9	14
February	4	2	6
March	2	7	9
April	3	4	7
May	8	4	12
June	2	3	5
July	3	6	9
August	2	3	5
September	6	6	12
October	1	2	3
November	2	3	5
December	2	7	9
	40	56	96

CAUSES OF DEATH.

The monthly returns from the Registrar enable us to trace out with a tolerable degree of accuracy, the general causes of death and the most fatal forms of disease, these may be classified as follows:—

1st. Heart affections have proved fatal in 18 cases as compared with 13 for the preceding year.

2nd. Phthisis has caused 4 deaths which is lower than has often been recorded in past years.

3rd. Bronchial diseases account for 9 deaths as against 17 for 1895.

4th. Cerebral diseases have resulted in 6 deaths as compared with 11 for the previous year; and those complaints that come under the head of malignant diseases, including Cancers, have carried off 5 persons. It is somewhat remarkable that this number corresponds exactly with the years 1892, 1893 and 1895, when the fatality arising from this sad affliction has been precisely the same.

On former occasions I have had to allude to the striking similarity that occurs in the prevalence of certain forms of disease from year to year, and of which the one under notice may be regarded to be a noticeable illustration.

5th. Injuries account for 6 deaths, and the rest may be considered as being due to complaints of a variable and uncertain type including 10 from old age and 5 from premature birth, beyond which it will be needless to enter into further detail.

The following statement may convey some idea of the varying mortality in the Urban District from year to year.

In the year 1892 were registered 109 deaths.

1893	„	128	„
1894	„	95	„
1895	„	108	„
1896	„	96	„

SANITATIONS.

Under this head may be included the results of various systematic visits made by the Inspector and myself, which are duly recorded in the monthly journal and regularly brought under the notice of the Sanitary Committee, under whose direction action is taken whenever it is deemed necessary for the preservation of public or family health.

These inspections are chiefly directed to the poorer parts of the district where some supervision is usually the most required so as to maintain such localities in a proper Sanitary condition, and where property is more liable to fall into a state of neglect, either on the part of owners, or otherwise of their tenants, who are too apt to become indifferent to the value of that in which they have only a temporary concern.

As regards the water supply, nothing further need be said than has been stated on former occasions, as its high quality and abundance leave nothing further to be desired.

Although the under-ground springs fell to a lower level in the months of Autumn than has been known for many years in consequence of the deficient rainfall, no complaints reached us of actual failure either on the part of pumps or bores, or that procured from the deep shaft belonging to the Driffeld Water Company.

Only a few remarks are needed upon another important auxiliary to the health and comfort of the inhabitants, namely the system of drainage and scavenging which has now been in operation for some years.

In reference to the former, few complaints now reach us of bad smells arising from street gullies or house drains, and this is still more remarkable when we call to mind the long continued drought of last summer and the consequent deficiency of rain water for flushing the main sewers.

Large quantities of refuse and night soil are daily removed from the premises and back yards where their presence would be likely to 'prove injurious or objectionable and carted away some distance from the town and afterwards sold for agricultural purposes. Open ashpits which at one time were conspicuous in consequence of their offensive and unsightly character have now disappeared, and may be said to have been practically abolished.

The subsequent part of this report will chiefly consist of brief abstracts from the monthly journal, which will convey some idea of the duties that have devolved upon the Inspector and myself during the past year.

January.—An Inspection was made of various localities including the public Schools, a Chapel, and a district comprised within the area of the 3 lanes where the poorer portion of our population chiefly reside, and some of the Slaughter Houses came under our observation.

A fatal case of Diphtheria was also investigated and fully reported upon in compliance with a resolution passed by the Sanitary Committee.

Death rate 29·4.

February.—Visited several parts of the district where cases of illness had recently occurred, and where we had cause to suspect they might be dependent upon unsanitary conditions.

The Public Schools were again visited, and in one instance new drainage connections were being laid down, and so far as could then be ascertained were being carried out in a proper manner.

In accordance with some recent regulations, we also visited several Workshops so as to find out whether suitable precautions were adopted so as to safe-guard the health of those who may be employed therein.

Some of the Cowsheds were also inspected.

Death rate 12·6.

March.—Visited the Filtration Area where active measures were going on for cleaning the trenches so as to afford greater facilities for the purification and discharge of the Sewage. Inspected dwellings along Wansford Road, River Head, etc., and premises belonging to the Driffeld Cake Company.

Casual visits were also paid to houses where young persons were employed as Sempstresses under the Workshop and Factory Act.

Death rate 18·9.

April.—No urgent circumstances having arisen during this month so as to demand any special attention, our duties were mainly confined to the ordinary details of Sanitary work.

Several parts of our district were visited which it would be needless to specify, also the Public Schools where the average attendance gives a fairly correct gauge in estimating the prevalence of any particular ailments amongst the Children.

Extensive alterations were going forward under the supervision of the Committee at the Filtration Area with a view of rendering this important part of our drainage system more efficient for its intended use.

Death rate 14·0.

May.—The usual visits were paid by the Inspector and myself to the northern extremity of our district, including the Lodging Houses, and attention was directed to the objectionable practice of sweeping out of shops and houses, waste paper and other kinds of refuse, and advising such steps to be taken as would be likely to lead to its discontinuance.

Several other minor matters engaged our attention more or less relative to the public health.

Death rate 22·0.

June.—Reference was made in the monthly report to the long continuance of dry weather, and the increased demand upon our water supply, and its greater consumption due to the exhaustion of the usual means of storage for rain water.

Fortunately no special complaints arose, but in the face of a possible deficiency due to the failure of our usual supply from wells and bores, a suggestion was made that wasteful extravagance should be carefully avoided.

Death rate 10·0.

July—Without entering upon any minute details it may be stated that various sections of our district came under our observation, and the attention of property owners was called to such defects as were apparent before being permitted to appear in our monthly report. Although the average temperature ruled high, and the rain-fall inadequate to wash out drains and sewers, few complaints arose about bad smells, and those that did occur were traceable to some neglected gully which a little attention might easily have obviated.

Death rate 18·9.

August.—Visited the Public Schools, one being then closed owing to certain structural alterations and improvements going on, and at that period approaching a state of completion.

The great attention now being paid to School buildings is a noticeable feature of the present age, and contrasts very favourably with those gloomy and unsightly structures which were thought to be quite good enough to meet the educational needs of a former generation.

The usual inspections were made but do not call forth any special comment.

Death rate 10·5.

September —A complaint was made to the Authority in consequence of a bad smell arising from some Piggeries, and this led to a lengthy report being presented to the Committee dealing with this difficult and complicated subject.

At a later period the Sanitary Committee made a special visit to the premises complained of, and arrived at the conclusion that there were no circumstances to justify any active interference in the matter.

Since then we have heard no further complaint.

Death rate 21·0.

October.—The report for this month presents no special feature of general interest, beyond the usual details of Sanitary work, including visits to various localities, the Filtration Area and the Public Schools, together with the comments thereon as might be deemed useful for the information of the Committee.

The most conspicuous feature in the report was the unusually low death rate, and as commented upon as being the lowest that had occurred since the adoption of the Public Health Act.

Death rate 6·8.

November.—The health of the Urban District as indicated by the low death rate was still maintained during this month, although not precisely at the same figure as was reached in the month of October, inasmuch as the number of deaths had advanced from 3 to 5. It was also noticed as a singular coincidence, that precisely the same number took place in the corresponding month of last year.

Death rate 10·5.

December.—Some observations were made this month on the steady although perhaps tardy improvement in the condition of the several premises we have occasion to visit. As regards Cowsheds something remained still to be done so as to bring them up to that high standard of cleanliness it was desirable to reach, and how difficult it was to overcome old habits and prejudices which had been the growth and custom of many years.

The removal of offal and other offensive matters from Slaughter Houses was mentioned as being another circumstance where some alterations had been effected with beneficial results.

Death rate 18·0.

I have the honour to remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

RICHARD WOOD,

Medical Officer of Health.

Driffield, Jan. 23rd, 1897.

